

Media, PA — This Flag Day, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-7) convened a meeting of his Veterans Advisory Committee to discuss issues—both locally and in Washington—related to Veterans that have arisen since the group last met in December. — The VAC complements the Congressman's efforts in the District and in the Capitol by facilitating a two-way dialogue in a regular forum that offers the Congressman a first hand appreciation for the scope and breadth of issues facing veterans in the 7th Congressional District. The meeting took place at the Congressman's District Office.

"During my time in the Navy I had a wonderful opportunity to serve with some of the most incredible men and women I have ever met, and this advisory committee affords me the chance to stay in close contact with my colleagues who also served in the Armed Forces," said Congressman Sestak, a former 3-star Admiral who served in the Navy for 31 years and who is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. "Our nation owes its Veterans a great debt of gratitude, and speaking with them on a regular basis ensures that we are hearing and meeting their needs and treating them with the dignity and respect they so deeply deserve."

The Congressman opened up the meeting by discussing Radnor's Flag Day Ceremony, which he attended Friday morning. At that ceremony, the Congressman gave remarks about service to one's country and paid a special tribute to the Tuskegee Airman, who had two members at the ceremony. "Having served in the military for 31 years, I truly understand the sacrifices that each and every member of our armed forces makes, especially those who give their lives to defend the freedom and liberty that our flag represents," said Congressman Sestak yesterday. "While honoring the brave men and women in uniform, we must also pay proper respect to the immense sacrifices military families make every day."

During the meeting, the Congressman discussed recent legislation that benefits Veterans, such as the Heroes Earnings Assistance and Tax Relief (HEART) Act, which includes tax provisions intended to assist military personnel and their families, Veterans and public service volunteers. He also voted in support of—and included key provisions to-- and the House passed, H.R. 5658, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009. This bill authorizes a pay raise of 3.9%, an increase of 0.5% above the budget request. This further reduces the gap in pay increases between the uniformed services and the private sector to 2.9%. In addition, it extends the prohibitions on increased premiums and co-pays for TRICARE recipients and increased user fees for the TRICARE retail pharmacy program. This will save beneficiaries \$1.2 billion in healthcare costs. H.R. 5658 also establishes a series of projects that focus on

preventive care to reduce the need for care required by service members, rather than reducing the amount of care available or the size of the beneficiary population.

Furthermore, H.R. 5658 provides tuition assistance and training opportunities for those spouses seeking degrees or careers that are portable, such as nursing, mental health providers and financial educators, as they move with their military spouse from station to station. The bill also includes provisions so that when both military parents are deployed simultaneously, the bill authorizes DOD to pay a portion of a second family separation allowance. Finally, within this bill is an amendment that the Congressman offered which expands the coverage of Autism benefits for children of members of the Armed Services within ECHO.

The Congressman also supported all three amendments of the Iraq War Supplemental Appropriations Act. As you know, one of the amendments which was passed by the House included a number of measures to expand benefits under the GI bill. The provisions expand the education benefits veterans receive under the GI bill to restore the promise of a full, four-year college education, and make the veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan part of an American economic recovery, just like the veterans of World War II were. These provisions were fully offset in the House approved bill. The increased educational benefits will be available to all members of the military who have served on active duty since September 11, 2001, including activated reservists and National Guard. To qualify, veterans must have served at least three to thirty-six months of qualified active duty, beginning on or after September 11, 2001. The bill provides for educational benefits to be paid in amounts linked to the amount of active duty served in the military after 9/11.

The Congressman also spoke of his second Veterans Summit, which was held at Ridley High School on May 12. Some 350 local Veterans gathered together for two panels—featuring House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Bob Filner—on issues ranging from Veterans health care to education opportunities, while outside the auditorium representatives from numerous Veterans organizations staffed 35 tables to help Vets with whatever concerns they might have.

The Veterans Advisory Committee is one of a number of issue and action-oriented advisory bodies Congressman Sestak is establishing to stay connected with the needs of 7th Congressional District constituents. Currently these include the FAA Flight Path Redesign Expert Advisory Board, the 7th CD Labor Advisory Committee, and the Committee for Excellence in Community Education. Additional groups will include Congressman Sestak's Seniors Forum, an Economic Advisory Committee, a Health Care Advisory Committee, an Environmental Advisory Committee, an Anti-Violence and Community Action Committee, a Women in Business Advisory Committee, an Elementary and Secondary Education Advisory

Committee, and a Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee.

“These advisory committees provide me the opportunity to work directly with some of the most respected and knowledgeable men and women in the 7th Congressional District. By meeting with these passionate and well-informed constituents on a regular basis, I am better prepared to sponsor the legislation necessary to address their concerns. It also affords me the opportunity to report back to the district on what has been happening in Washington.”

The following veterans and veteran family members serve or act as advisors to the 7th CD Veterans Advisory Committee:

- Fern Billet (advisor), Department of Veterans Affairs, Philadelphia Veterans Administration Hospital
- Thomas Albert Clay, 1st Vice-Commander, American Legion, Smith-Howard Post No. 93
- Richard Coyne, Department Services Officer for Veterans of Foreign Wars at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Philadelphia.
- Shawn Diggory, Iraqi War Vet
- Robert J. Dimond, Korean War Vet
- Jeffrey Elliot, District Commander, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), District 7
- Richard B. Ellis, Commander, American Legion, Post 761 (Briarcliffe Memorial)
- Marsha Four, Vietnam Veterans of America
- Gerald J. Gavin, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), Herbert W. Best Post #928
- William T. Lewis, Vietnam Vet
- Hon. Robert A. McMahon, Jr., Mayor of Media, Treasurer and Co-Executive Director of the Vietnam Veterans Legacy Foundation
- Rocco Polidoro, Commander of American Legion Post 227 in Springfield.
- Thomas Reed, Professor of Law at Widener University School of Law and the Director of the School's Veterans Clinic
- Matthew Mark Ross, Iraqi War Vet
- Honorable William Scott Jr., Vietnam Era Vet
- Raymond Stankus, Vietnam Vet
- Kathleen Sweeney, Soldiers' Angels
- Gene Taylor, Vietnam Vet
- Edward Vick, Vietnam Vet
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Additional Legislation

H.R. 4253 – Provides America's veterans and reservists some of the economic security they deserve by:

- Strengthening federal efforts to expand opportunities for veteran-owned businesses
- Providing new small business loans and expanding outreach to veteran-owned small businesses
- Strengthening relief to small businesses employing National Guard or Reserve troops
- Became law February 14, 2008

H.R. 6081 – Heroes Earnings Assistance and Relief Tax Act (Heart Act) – Addresses tax issues to reduce economic problems for military families.

- Awaiting President's signature

H.R. 2642 – amendment to Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2008 – Included a provision to expand GI benefits for Veterans' education. Expands the education benefits that Veterans receive under the GI Bill to restore a promise of a four year education to make the Veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan part of America's economic recovery, just like the Veterans of WW II were.

- The amendment passed the House on May 23, 2008

H.R. 2818 – Amends the U.S. Code to provide for the establishment of Epilepsy Centers of Excellence in the Veterans Health Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

- Congressman Sestak – Co-sponsor
- June 11, 2008 reported to House of consideration

H.R. 2790 – Amends the U.S. Code to establish the position of Director of Physician Assistant Services within the office of the Under Secretary of Veterans Affairs for Health.

- Congressman Sestak – Co-sponsored
- Passed the House May 20, 2008

H.R. 3221 – American Housing Rescue and Foreclosure Prevention Act of 2008 – Helps Veterans and service members by increasing Veterans Affairs Home Loan limits for high-cost housing areas so that our Veterans have access to more opportunities for homeownership. Also helps our returning soldiers avoid foreclosure by lengthening the time a lender must wait before starting foreclosure, from three months to one year after a soldier returns from service.

- Passed the House May 8, 2008

H.R. 3681 – Amends the U.S. Code to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to advertise in the national media to promote awareness of benefits under laws administered by the Secretary.

- Passed the House May 21, 2008

H.R. 3819 – Amends the U.S. Code to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to reimburse veterans receiving emergency treatment in non-Department of Veterans Affairs facilities for such treatment until such veterans are transferred to Department facilities, and for other purposes.

- Congressman Sestak – Co-sponsor
- Passed the House May 21, 2008

H.R. 3889 – Amends the U.S. Code to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct a longitudinal study of the vocational rehabilitation programs administered by the Secretary.

- Passed the House May 20, 2008.

H.R. 4169 - To authorize the placement in Arlington National Cemetery of an American Braille tactile flag honoring blind members of the Armed Forces, Veterans, and other Americans.

- Passed the House on February 14, 2008.

H.R. 5554 – Amends the U.S. Code to expand and improve health care services available to Veterans from the Department of Veterans Affairs for substance use disorders, and for other purposes.

- Passed the House May 20, 2008.

H.R. 5664 – Amends the U.S. Code to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to update at least once every six years the plans and specifications for specially adapted housing furnished to Veterans by the Secretary.

- Passed the House May 20, 2008.

H.R. 5729 – Amends the U.S. Code to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide comprehensive health care to children of Vietnam veterans born with Spina Bifida, and for other purposes.

- Passed the House May 20, 2008.

H.R. 5826 - To increase, effective as of December 1, 2008, the rates of disability compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for survivors of certain service-connected disabled veterans, and for other

purposes.

- Passed the House May 21, 2008.

H.R. 5856 - To authorize major medical facility projects and major medical facility leases for the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2009, and for other purposes.

- Passed the House May 21, 2008.

H.R. 6048 - To amend the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to provide for the protection of child custody arrangements for parents who are members of the Armed Forces and deployed in support of a contingency operation.

- Passed the House May 20, 2008

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University.

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